



Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Guides: Paul's Letters* (Bellingham : Logos Bible Software), 2013.

If the function or purpose of a 'Bible Guide' is to offer readers an overview of the text or to give aid and assistance in discovering chief issues then the present series nicely achieves its goal. Each book (and I have at hand 1-2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) is briefly introduced, authorship is discussed, time and place of composition and recipients are described, and then key themes are analyzed.

So, for instance, in their analysis of Galatians, our editorial team opine concerning the 'theme' of the letter:

Three key themes run throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians. First, the authenticity of the gospel, including its message (Gal 3:1–4:7) and messenger (Gal 1:11–2:21), dominates the shape of the letter. Paul was deeply worried that the Galatian believers were mistakenly following a false gospel and false teacher rather than his gospel and apostleship, which came directly from God (Gal 1:1, 11–12, 15–16). Second, the connection between the gospel and the OT law and covenants is essential to Paul's defense of his gospel in Gal 3:1–4:7. In Galatians 3:6–9, Paul appeals to Abraham's trust in God as scriptural support for his gospel of justification by faith. Then, in the following passage, he interprets Jesus' death as a curse in light of Deut 27:26. To demonstrate the primacy of justification by faith over law-keeping, Paul draws attention to the chronology of the OT narrative in Gen 3:15–18. He argues that since the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2–3; 15:5; 17:8; 22:17–18) was made 430 years *before* the law was given (Exod 12:40), the Abrahamic promise—that the Gentiles would be included as part of God's people—transcends the law and its requirements. In Galatians 4:21–31, Paul presents his readers with allegorical interpretations of the stories of Hagar and Sarah and of Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 16, 21). Third, Paul repeats the theme of Christian freedom from the opening of the letter to its close (Gal 1:3–4; 6:14–15).

There's nothing inaccurate here, nothing out of place, nothing amiss. But neither is there anything revolutionary, groundbreaking, or controversial. And it is precisely that apparent (and real) 'blandness' which makes this guide ideal.

Guides, it seems to me, do not aim to stir controversy or even to provoke debate. They simply, clearly, concisely, and carefully state the facts and they do so neither too briefly nor too

lengthily. They strike a balance, or at least they should, between basic introduction and commentary.

After the usual introductory matters (including an outline of each book), our writers also provide something they call 'Issues at a Glance'. So, again for Galatians, they include:

Issues at a Glance

- Present Evil Age
- A Different Gospel
- Traditions of My Fathers
- Paul's Divine Call
- Key Word Study: Apostolos, "Sent One"
- Key Word Study: Metatithēmi, "To Turn Away"
- Key Word Study: Anathema, "Accursed"
- Key Word Study: Apokalyptō, "To Reveal"

All of which are, to be sure, important topics in the book of Galatians. However, and this has always been the case, I cannot quite comprehend the purpose of transliteration. Readers of Greek do not need such helps and readers of English, who have no training in Greek, cannot use transliterated terms except to pretend that they know a Greek word or two.

If our editors wish to highlight the word 'αποκαλυπτω', for instance, the Greek word suffices and if their audience is uninformed concerning Greek 'to reveal' is sufficient. Transliteration has never, to me, made sense. Here's a screenshot of their 'word study':

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Galatians 1:1-24

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 "Anathema" New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

Apokalyptō, "To Reveal." In this context, the term *apokalyptō*, typically translated as "to reveal" or "to unveil," likely refers to Jesus' appearance to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-22; 26:2-23; compare 1 Cor 15:8-9). It refers not only to the historical event of when Paul saw the resurrected Jesus, but also to God's *revealing* of the truth concerning His Son to Paul. In Galatians 1:12, Paul uses the related noun *apokalypsis* to emphasize the divine origin of his gospel. Essentially, Paul uses "revelation" language in his letters to describe God's direct communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in contrast to receiving it from humans or tradition (see Eph 3:3-5).



Elsewhere in his letters, Paul uses similar terminology to refer to his calling. In Romans 1:17, he declares that God's righteousness is revealed (*apokalypsetai*) in the gospel. Paul says in Gal 1 the gospel and the Son were revealed to him (Gal 1:12, 16; compare 2:2). Likewise, in Romans 16:25, Paul speaks of the "revelation of the mystery" (*apokalypsin mystēriou*) that was previously kept secret. Paul describes knowledge of true wisdom as being revealed (*apekalypsen*) to believers through the Spirit in 1 Cor 2:10.

 "Apokalyptō" The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
 "Apokalyptō" New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
 "Apokalyptō" The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament

Readers will note right away the clarity and accuracy of the explanation of the word at hand. Note also that at the bottom of the entry resources which owners of the software have installed on their machines shows either open and available or locked and unavailable. This is a very useful feature indeed as it allows further research on a particular word with the mere click on the mouse.

Each section also contains what the authors call an 'application overview': Paul's harsh rebuke of the Galatians in Gal 1:6-9 issues a strong reminder to modern believers of the folly of accepting distorted versions of the gospel. Although Paul's letter to the Galatians is primarily about the gospel and Paul's apostleship (see Gal 2:15-21; 1:15-16), the tone of the entire letter reminds believers—then and now—of the serious nature of the gospel. Paul's sharp response to the Galatians surfaces at several points in the letter's opening chapter. As we mentioned above, Paul replaces the usual thanksgiving section of the letter with an admonishment of the Galatians for accepting another gospel (Gal 1:6). Remarkably, Paul considers this treacherous act not simply as a departure from the gospel, but from God Himself. Paul also denounces those who preach the other gospel to a severe fate: "Let them be accursed" (Gal 1:8-9). Paul's difficult but necessary words to his readers remind us that the gospel is of utmost

importance in God's world and therefore should not be taken lightly. As Scripture, Galatians 1:6–9 urges us to resist distorted versions of the gospel and instead to hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ, “who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal 1:4 ESV).

Whilst some might quibble with the application of ancient texts to modern situations I think that the task of exegesis is not completed until some application is rendered. A dusty lifeless voiceless text may suit those who have no vested interest in the meaning of Scripture but for people of faith application is absolutely required.

On the whole, then, this is really an excellent tool. It is useful, in my view, not only for beginning students of the Bible but for those wishing to introduce various biblical texts to Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, and small group discussions.

The Bible is a treasure book. This series does a very fine job of introducing interested persons to many of the letters of Paul and divulging to them just some of the treasures contained therein. It is a series from faith to faith: by people of faith for people of faith. Consequently, unlike so many volumes published these days, they're actually functional.

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